

# Smash the Reactionary Junta— For Workers Revolution in Chile!

SEPTEMBER 12—Yesterday's rightist coup in Chile put a bloody end to the three-year-old Popular Unity government headed by President Salvador Allende. This seizure of power by the military is a serious defeat for the international working class, leading to a naked assault against the workers' organizations and to the massacre of possibly thousands of proletarian militants. It is not yet clear to what extent the Chilean workers and peasants will forcibly resist the putschists; their heroic will to defend their organizations is not in doubt, but the Allende government consistently refused to arm the workers. It is the duty of all U.S. working-class organizations, both trade unions and parties, to launch an immediate, united-front protest against the counterrevolutionary coup. Smash the reactionary junta—For workers revolution in Chile!

The events of the last two days tragically confirm the Spartacist League's warnings that the Chilean working people would pay in blood for the treachery of their leaders. The triumph of bourgeois reaction after three years of the Allende government was no accident! It was prepared by the very nature of the *Unidad Popular* [UP—Popular Unity] coalition.

As the Spartacist League insisted in a leaflet issued on September 4:

"The government of the *Unidad Popular* is not a workers government. It is a coalition of workers and capitalist parties. The presence of the 'radical' bourgeoisie and the 'democratic' generals is a guarantee that the Allende government will not step beyond the bounds of capitalism. Their presence is a guarantee that the workers and peasants will be left disarmed and atomized in the face of the impending rightist coup. Rather than pressuring Allende... we must instead call on the workers to break sharply with the bourgeois popular front and the government parties, to fight for a workers and peasants government based on a revolutionary program of expropriation of the agrarian and industrial bourgeoisie."

The seductive claims of the dominant workers parties that socialism could be won through elections and parliamentary action and in collaboration with "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie have again proven to be simply the formula for defeat. The so-called "Chilean road to socialism" was lauded the world over by pro-Moscow Communist Parties as the model of revolution through peaceful coexistence; and the Chilean capitalists—touted as the most "democratic" bourgeoisie of Latin America, with the most "non-political" military—were supposed to passively acquiesce to the transition to socialism!

But only the independent class mobilization of the proletariat to seize state power in its own name can open the road to socialism. A popular front is by its very nature—its alliance with a section of the ruling class—confined within the bounds of capitalism. It can never prepare the way for workers power. It can succeed only in frightening the forces of bourgeois reaction to the point that they undertake a concerted and brutal assault on the workers, in alienating and driving into the arms of the reaction sections of the petty bourgeoisie which would have split if faced with a clear proletarian pole, and in disorienting the workers through class-collaborationist illusions so that they cannot mobilize an organized and united self-defense against the rightist reaction. The lesson of Chile today is the lesson of the Spanish Civil War of the 1930's: if the workers do not learn in time that popular fronts, parliamentarism and peaceful coexistence lead to defeat, they will pay with their lives.

## What Was the Popular Unity?

The Popular Unity coalition was made up of the dominant workers parties, the reformist Communists and Socialists, together with the Radical



Chilean armed forces chiefs witness Allende-Castro reunion, November 1971.

Party and left Christian Democrats. Since the 1970 elections both the Radicals and left Christian Democrats have had splits, with pro-UP sections moving leftward and even claiming to support socialism. But the essence of the Popular Unity as a bloc with a section of the bourgeoisie was not changed. The UP government from the beginning rested on a tacit agreement with the dominant bourgeois party, the Christian Democrats, without whose votes Allende could not get a single one of his reforms passed by Congress. More recently as the rightist attack on the government sharpened, the role of chief guarantor of the interests of the bourgeoisie within the government was taken over by the military ministers.

The government adopted a policy of appeasing the rightists and increasing repression of the workers. Thus after the "bosses' work stoppage" by the truck owners and shopkeepers during November 1972, Allende invited the military leaders into the government and promulgated a law which permits unannounced raids by the military in search of arms. This law, though ostensibly directed against both right- and left-wing extremists, has in fact been used exclusively against the unions, the occupied factories and the workers parties, while fascist groups such as *Patria y Libertad* built up sizeable arms stockpiles. Then during May and June the government provoked a copper miners' strike at the El Teniente mine by attempting to do away with the sliding scale of wages (cost-of-living escalator), and turned machine guns on the workers during the course of the strike (see *WV* No. 23, 22 June 1973).

## Popular Front and Parliamentary Cretinism

Although the reformists have constantly attempted to portray Chile as the most radical popular-front government in history (compared to Spain 1936-39, France 1934-36 or Chile at different times from 1936 to 1948), the myth is far from reality. Thus in Spain the industrial centers were entirely in the hands of workers militias for much of the period after July 1936 and

most of the factories were operated under workers control. In Chile, Allende signed an agreement in 1970 not to permit the formation of workers militias nor to promote officers from outside the graduates of the military academies, thus guaranteeing that the army would remain firmly under the control of the professional military elite. The Spanish workers were armed; for the most part, Chilean workers are not.

But a popular front is a popular front. The Spanish workers were defeated by Franco because they did not have a revolutionary leadership which struggled to overthrow capitalism. Instead the workers and peasants were constrained by the Stalinist Communist Party and the Assault Guards to remain within the bounds of bourgeois democracy. In their more honest moments the Stalinists would justify this in terms of not "scaring the bourgeoisie," but they also had a theory to justify it. While Lenin had made the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" world-famous as the call for a workers revolution, Stalin "discovered" in 1924 that before the stage of soviets there had to come an intermediate "democratic" stage. In essence this was identical to the position of the reformist social democrats, who called for winning power through parliamentary elections as a "step" in the gradual transformation of capitalism. Now in the 1970's this theory was resurrected by Allende's UP:

"Since the National Congress is based on the people's vote, there is nothing in its nature which prevents it from changing itself in order to become, in fact, the Parliament of the People. The Chilean Armed Forces and the Carabineros, faithful to their duty and to their tradition of non-intervention in the political process, will support a social organization which corresponds to the will of the people..."

—S. Allende, "First Message to Congress," December 1970

Historical experience again disproved this reformist fairy tale yesterday for the nth time!

The Chilean CP has throughout lived up to its Stalinist mission of reformist betrayal. Thus, in line with the Stalinists' call to broaden the Popular Unity



Members of the junta: From left, General Gustavo Leigh, General Augusto Pinochet, Admiral José Toribio Merino.

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## Counterrevolution in Chile

Washington Square Methodist Church  
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Friday 21 September

to include the Christian Democrats, they also opposed an extensive program of nationalizations. In order to "regularize the economy" CP minister Orlando Millas introduced legislation which would restrict nationalizations to certain specific sectors and return factories occupied by the workers to their "legal" owners!

The CP not only opposed the formation of workers militias, but Luis Corvalán, secretary-general of the party, rejected any form of arming the workers since such proposals "are equivalent to showing distrust in the army." (This is, of course, true. And the Stalinists, of course, never show distrust in the bourgeois army. Thus even after yesterday's coup, the *Daily World* [12 September] claimed only "a section" of the armed forces were involved, particularly the "traditionally upper middle-class Air Force." The army no doubt appreciated this "trust," which facilitated the generals' reactionary coup.)

Shortly before the coup, French CP leader Bernard Fajon returning from Chile held a press conference in order to denounce:

"...certain economic theories which put the accent on the destruction of the old structures...."

"The occupation of the factories by the workers...transformed in certain cases into taking possession of companies not included in the program of nationalizations...."

"...irresponsible and adventurist positions, such as the leftist slogan of calling on the soldiers to disobey [orders], which facilitates the efforts of officers favorable to a coup d'etat: such as the leftist slogan of exclusive workers control in all factories, tending to line up the engineers and professionals against the working class...."

"The Communist Party of Chile has led and leads the most consistent struggle against these absolutely crazy views...."

—*Le Monde*, 3 September

Meanwhile, as the CP was clamoring to unite with the Christian Democrats and disarm the "ultra-leftists," calling on the workers to give up the factories to their legal owners, the Soviet Union gave practically nothing in the way of economic aid to Chile. The utter cynicism which lies behind the Stalinists' calls for "unity of all democratic forces" (i.e., including the Christian Democrats in Chile who just helped prepare a counterrevolutionary coup, and such liberal U.S. Democrats as Lyndon Johnson) can be seen in Angela Davis' foolish remark at a pro-Allende rally following the coup: "I don't think it's a defeat, it's a setback of course" (*New York Times*, 12 September). With setbacks like this, what would a real defeat look like?

But the class-collaborationist logic of Stalinism is not limited to the direct followers of Brezhnev and Kosygin. The erstwhile guerrilla warrior Fidel Castro made his support for the bourgeois UP government clear in all of its glory during his visit November 1971 when he called on copper workers at the Chuquicamata mine to moderate their wage demands and work harder. A few months later he again expressed his "anti-imperialist" solidarity by inviting Chilean generals to visit Cuba.

#### Preparation of the Coup

In order to excuse their own betrayals in Chile the Stalinists are now claiming that the coup is the work of fascists and extreme reactionaries in league with the CIA. There is no doubt that the ultra-right provided leadership of the coup and was in contact with the U.S. government. ITT's offer of \$1 million in 1970 to dump Allende is certainly not unrelated to the "accidental" presence of American navy ships in Chilean waters on the day of the coup.

But to hold only the "ultras" and the CIA responsible for the coup is to ignore the bulk of the Chilean bourgeoisie. The CP wants us to believe that only American capitalists will protect their property! In reality, the Chilean capitalists saw the handwriting on the wall as workers committees took over hundreds of factories following the abortive coup on June 29; they were joined by the military general staff after the

discovery of leftist cells in the navy in early August. The September 11 coup is their answer. This coup was no fascist plot or the work of a few military "ultras." It represents the decision by the key sectors of the bourgeoisie to smash the increasingly militant workers movement. Every important section of the Chilean capitalist class, including the "moderate" Christian Democrats and the "constitutionalist" officers, is involved in one way or another.

That its real aim is to smash the workers movement was amply proven on the first day of military rule. The fall of the government itself was quickly, almost surgically, accomplished by a classic *pronunciamento* by the heads



Workers militia of cordon Vicuña Mackenna. Due to policy of CP-SP and trade unions most workers are unarmed.

of the armed forces and a short bombardment of the presidential palace. The presidential guard surrendered, while Allende either committed suicide or was shot. But during the first day of military rule, more than 1,000 people were killed and more than 100 leaders of workers parties and unions arrested. The generals threatened to blow up any factory which resisted.

Their particular concern was the mushrooming workers committees (the "cordones industriales") in the industrial belts around Santiago. The *New York Times* (12 September) reported: "In the proclamation by the junta that seized power today, the factory groups were cited as a reason for the revolt." The day before, an air force commando had attempted to raid the important Sumar textile factory, looking for arms. The workers, who have occupied the factory, successfully repulsed the soldiers with gunfire and the commando was eventually forced to retreat as reinforcements from surrounding plants arrived (*Le Monde*, 11 September). The air force had carried out similar raids twice during August, apparently trying to provoke a shootout with the workers. This time they lost—and that was perhaps the last straw; it was high time to get rid of Allende. Brought to power in order to control the labor movement, he lost his usefulness as he increasingly proved unable to discipline the workers. And with a flick of its finger, the bourgeoisie toppled him.

That the coup was not simply the work of the fascists and ultra-reactionaries is shown by several facts: In addition to Admiral José Toribia Merino, a sympathizer of Patria y Libertad, the junta also includes Army commander General Augusto Pinochet, a leading "constitutionalist." Moreover, the whole recent chain of events was triggered by the resignation of General Carlos Prats on August 23. General Prats, the leading "constitutionalist" and Minister of Defense, stepped down in order, as he put it, "to preserve the unity of the institution" (the military). He was followed by two other military

ministers. These resignations represented a vote of no confidence in the government by all wings of the general staff of the armed forces. From that time on, the coup was simply a question of timing and personnel.

Nor was it simply a military matter. The atmosphere for the military takeover was provided by the economic chaos resulting from the truck owners', shopkeepers' and professionals' work stoppage which had continued for more than a month and a half. This was a clearly political effort designed to bring down the government, as was the similar work stoppage last year. The truck owners' confederation is closely tied to the National Party, while most of the other professional associations are linked to the Christian Democrats. Both in November and August of this year the CDP directly called on its professional associations to join the counterrevolutionary action. Thus while its leaders in parliament talked soothingly of waiting until the 1976 elections, the Christian Democratic Party was preparing the coup along with every other sector of the bourgeoisie.

#### The "Revolutionary" Left

As the masses of Chilean workers and peasants have become progressively disillusioned with the reformist CP and SP they have begun searching for an alternative leadership. Many have joined the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario [MIR—Revolutionary Left Movement], the most important group to the left of the UP. The MIR is a New Left-Castroite group which until 1970 concentrated largely on organizing peasants for land takeovers and guerrilla warfare. After taking an ultra-left line by abstaining from the 1970 election on principle, the MIR suddenly flip-flopped and issued a statement immediately after the election giving Allende critical support. It continued to call for support to the UP in one form or another until the very end: "The Revolutionary Left Movement maintains that although we do not agree with every step of the Popular Unity, that although we have differences with aspects of its policies, this does not signify that we come to a definitive break with the Popular Unity" (*Punto Final*, 9 November 1971). But it precisely is a "definitive break" that is called for. Here we have a government tied to a section of the bourgeoisie, whose main task is to hold the workers back from revolution—and the MIR gives it critical support! By this act of class betrayal it must take a major responsibility for the coup.

Furthermore, the MIR failed to raise as a key demand throughout this period the arming of the workers and the formation of workers militias based on the unions (and cordones industriales). Instead MIR documents speak only in the most general terms of the limits of peaceful reforms and of the need to "accumulate power to crush any seditious attempt or the civil war which the exploiters will attempt" (*El Rebelde*, 23-30 May). The main activity of the organization has been land and factory takeovers which, however militant they may be, failed to take on the question of the Allende government.

#### Chile and the American Left

Thus among the major socialist organizations in Chile there is none that called for the replacement of the popular-front regime with a workers government, i.e., called for the working class to break from the bourgeoisie; they instead capitulated to the UP government's (initial) tremendous popularity among the working masses. In the U.S., of all the ostensibly Trotskyist organizations the only one to take a clear stand against the popular-front UP government from the beginning was the Spartacist League. Immediately after the 1970 elections we wrote:

"It is the most elementary duty for revolutionary Marxists to irreconcilably oppose the Popular Front in the election and to place absolutely no confidence in it in power. Any 'critical support' to the Allende coalition is class treason, paving the way for a bloody

defeat for the Chilean working people when domestic reaction, abetted by international imperialism, is ready."

—*Spartacist*, November-December 1970

By way of contrast, the opportunist Workers League wrote that "the workers must hold Allende to his promises..." (*Bulletin*, 21 September 1970) while the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party's initial evaluation of the Allende election (*Intercontinental Press*, 5 October 1970) amounted to de facto critical support: "...failing to recognize the positive elements in it, condemning it in toto out of some sectarian dogmatism, would mean suicidal isolation." It would certainly have meant isolation in the early months of the Popular Unity government. But the principled Trotskyist position of unswerving opposition to the popular front was in fact the only alternative to suicide. It was support for Allende that led to the present counterrevolutionary coup.

A slogan cannot be applied mechanically in all situations. Thus at the time of the June 29 coup and during late August the SL called for "a united front of all workers organizations to smash the rightist-militarist offensive in Chile, while continuing to struggle for the overthrow of the popular-front government of 'socialists' and generals by proletarian revolution" ("Showdown in Chile," 4 September). Today, Marxists must struggle to smash the junta by a workers' uprising. To call for support to the UP is to reaffirm a policy whose suicidal nature is being demonstrated at this very moment! In a similar situation, when faced with the attempt in August 1917 by General Kornilov to overthrow the Kerensky government and crush the revolutionary workers of Petrograd, the Bolsheviks called for a united front of all workers organizations to smash the counterrevolutionary conspirators and even fought alongside the troops of the bourgeois Kerensky government. "Even now we must not support Kerensky's government," wrote Lenin:

"We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov, just as Kerensky's troops do, but we do not support Kerensky. On the contrary we expose his weakness. There is the difference. It is rather a subtle difference, but it is highly essential and must not be forgotten."

—"To the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.," 30 August 1917

But of course in the Chilean situation it would be manifestly absurd to call for even military support to the UP government, which has already been smashed.

Similarly to call on all "democrats" to defend civil liberties is to fail to understand the nature of the present coup. The junta will undoubtedly suppress civil liberties, even for the bourgeois parties, for a certain time. But its fundamental job is to crush the workers movement and it, in turn, can only be destroyed by a proletarian offensive.

Never have the lines between revolutionary Marxism and opportunism been clearer. They are drawn in blood, the coin in which betrayals are paid. ■

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